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An inaugural Dissertation  
on Dysentery as it appeared in the  
Counties of Loudoun & Fauquier  
Virginia by James Bailey Sullivan

No 60 J. 6<sup>th</sup>

Read March 19<sup>th</sup> 1823

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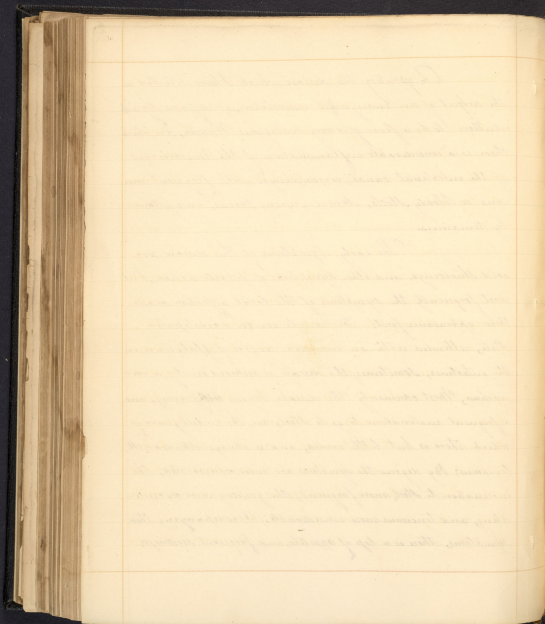
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The manuscript of the letter  
to the President of the  
Senate of the United States  
dated 10th March 1847  
is in the possession of the  
Library of Congress.

The letter is in the  
handwriting of the President.

Upon the disease which I have selected as the subject of an inaugural dissertation, is defined by most Authors to be a fever of a very contagious Nature, in which there is a considerable inflammation of the mucous coat of the intestinal canal, accompanied with frequent mucous or bloody stools, severe griping pains, and followed by tenesmus.

The early symptoms of this disease are cold shiverings, and other symptoms of febrile action, but most frequently the symptoms of the local affection make their appearance first; The bowels are in a constipated state, attended with an unusual degree of flatulence in the intestines, sometimes the disease is ushered in by a diarrhoea, Most commonly the disease begins with griping, and a frequent inclination to go to stool, in the indulgence of which there is but little voided, and is always attended with tenesmus; By degrees the symptoms are more exasperated, the inclination to stool more frequent, the griping more excruciating, and tenesmus more considerable; Accompanying these symptoms, there is a loss of appetite, and frequent sickness;





Nausea, and vomiting also affect the patient; The Stools although frequent are small in quantity, and are often without any natural feces intermixed, When the natural feces do appear, they are generally under the form of small, compact, and hard substances, known by the name of *Seytala*.

The causes which have generally been ascribed by Authors to the introduction of this distressing complaint; are a vitiated state of the Atmosphere, cold a moisture succeeding quickly to intense heat, or great drought, whereby the perspiration is suddenly checked, and a determination is suddenly made to the intestines, it is likewise not unfrequently induced, by some acid indigestible substance taken into the Stomach; This disease occurs especially in Summer, and Autumn, at the same time with Autumnal Remittent, and Inter-mittent fevers, and with these it is sometimes combined or complicated; therefore Dysentery may be induced by the same exciting causes which produce those fevers. -

By most Authors this disease is supposed to be of a



contagious nature, in consequence of making its first appearance, in a very limited number of patients, and then progressing with the greatest rapidity, spreading its ravages to a most alarming extent, and giving almost uncontested proofs of its pretensions to mortality, by the numbers which it consigns to an early grave; So soon as an inquiry was made by physicians as to the cause of its being so widely diffused, they being more willing to account for its origin, from accidental circumstances, and afterwards by contagion, They either directly, or indirectly traced the cause of the disease of all their patients, to a supposed infected spot, or garment, or someone actually labouring under the disease; Thus in my estimation have most Physicians placed their opinions on an erroneous foundation, as to the cause of Dysentery; It is true I believe an Atmosphere saturated with the exhalations arising from the faeces of a Dysenteric patient, may occasion the disease, but not sooner than the effluvia arising from any other putrid matter either Animal, or Vegetable, which never had any communication with



a person labouring under that complaint; No matter how widely I may differ in opinion from the learned and numerous Authors who have written on this disease,

I feel myself bound by candour to make this acknowledgment of my sentiments, not only the experience I have had in this disease, confirms me in the belief, that Dysentery is not a contagious disorder; but the opinion of my preceptor (Doct<sup>r</sup> Powell) to whom originally I am indebted for this belief, strengthens and bears me out in this conclusion. When the Dysentery prevailed as an epidemic in my native State, and County, persons innumerable were attacked by the disease, who never had an opportunity of receiving it by contagion, it prevailed in a very dry and warm season, the Atmosphere appeared much deteriorated, and which appeared very evidently to predispose the system to the reception of the disease, and, an excess of any kind more than usual, committed by the person, when labouring under the predisposing or remote cause, was sufficient to stimulate the disease into action; The vitiated state of the Atmosphere



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which, I take to be the remote, and external cause, how prevalent so ever it may be, is not sufficient to produce an effect, without a concurrence of the occasional or exciting causes, an excess of any kind such as eating, drinking, or violent exercise I consider the proximate or exciting causes. When the exciting or immediate causes are strong, they will produce the effect, independently of the predisposing or remote causes, but then, the disease is very slight, and often yields to the efforts of Nature in restoring the healthy action: but when there is unfortunately a concurrence of the predisposing, and immediate causes, then it is, we see the disease in its most perfect and dangerous form.

I have endeavoured as far as I am able to shew Dysentery is not a contagious disease, but depends entirely on the state of the Atmosphere, which is evidently the foundation of the disease, and which is in its action uniform; always according to the aptitude of the constitution to the reception of the disease.

The cure of Dysentery depends entirely on the stage of the complaint when medical aid is demanded by the patient; if fortunately it should be demanded





when in its recent state, there is little more to be done, than to lepan the inflammatory <sup>action</sup> accompanying this complaint, and to correct the morbid action of the glands, which pour their acid secretions into the intestinal cavity, this morbid derangement of the glands appears to be induced by a direct and sympathetic action with the stomach; which primarily receives the impression from a distempered atmosphere.

When the Practitioner is called in the secondary stage of the disease, there are few diseases better calculated to impose on the understanding of an inexperienced Physician, and seduce him beyond the bounds of discretion; it is attended with the most deceptive indications, the hemorrhages seem to require depletion by repeated venesection, the laxity of the intestines astringent remedies, the pains of the bowels and Abdomen, anodyne draughts, and injections, an indulgence in which is sure to be attended with the most injurious consequences; and will ultimately result in the most mortal effects; by removing the irritating cause of the disease by emetics, and cathartics, we most frequently modify the



symptoms, afterwards by sudorifics and tonics, we induce a  
 favourable termination of the disease. The fever attendant  
 on Dysentery has been divided by Doct Chopman into Inter-  
 mittent, Remittent, and Continued, Which last he says is  
 either Inflammatory, or Typhus; In all the cases of Dysentery  
 which have come under my observation, I have never met  
 with one solitary case, where there was a complete intermis-  
 sion of fever; they all evidently assumed the Remittent  
 form, and there never was an entire absence of fever,  
 until the occasional causes were removed, but as the origin  
 of these different forms of fever, have been ascribed to one  
 common cause, I do not know why it should not put on  
 the intermittent form, and which is more than probable,  
 coming from such unquestionable Authority; in my  
 opinion Dysentery is always at first attended with a most  
 violent inflammatory fever, by inattention and neglect  
 of which, it soon degenerates into a fever of a Typhoid type;  
 by injudicious management, it either puts on the form  
 of Intermittent, or Remittent fever, according to the suscepti-  
 bility of the constitution of the patient, to the improprie-



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of either of these fevers; It has been asserted by modern practitioners of considerable eminence, the Intermittent, the Bilious Remittent, and Continued fevers, the Inflammatory Dysentery, the Typhus Dysentery, and Yellow fever, depend on the different proportions of Miasmata blended with the Atmosphere; there is little doubt in my mind these assertions are strictly correct, if the Typhus form of Dysentery exists as a primary disease, which I have not been able in the course of my observation to ascertain; I have always found it a secondary disease, or the effect of a neglected inflammatory case; In all such cases the transition from one stage of the complaint, <sup>to the other</sup> is quite sudden, from being a disease of considerable arterial action, it suddenly falls into an opposite state of motion, a great irritability of the Nervous system, accompanied with great prostration of strength, and a rapid depression of the pulse, which is, I presume owing entirely to the great and sudden accumulation of Morbid Matter in the Intestinal canal; Doct Thomas mentions a late Writer (Doct Huxley) who asserts this stage of the complaint to be contagious, he



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insists that the simple Dysentery of itself never is contagious  
nor the Intermittent, or Remittent forms of the disease, that  
the combination with Typhus alone is possessed with that  
property, and thus he insists originates not in the virus  
specific to the Dysentery, but in the contagion of fever;  
I know not what idea the Doct<sup>r</sup> wishes to convey; by  
his ambiguous remarks, we might infer; that  
Dysentery attended with the Typhus form <sup>of fever</sup> was ca-  
pable of producing a similar complaint in another  
by contagion; which I am unwilling to admit, as it  
is in direct opposition to the practical information I  
have received, he acknowledges the Dysentery to be possessed  
of no specific virus; consequently it is incapable of  
being communicated by contagion, if any disease is  
produced by the contagion of fever, it must be the  
Typhus fever which will exist independent of Dysentery

The Pathology of Dysentery, I believe to be  
the same with <sup>that of</sup> all other cases of Phlegmasia; the differ-  
ence of this and all other inflammatory affections  
arises principally from the part affected added to that







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m  
of the Morbific cause, similar to most other inflamma-  
tory diseases it is accompanied with a want of healthy  
action on the skin; perspiration so essentially necessary  
to health is suppressed, which morbid arrange-  
ment greatly aggravates and adds to the pain and  
sufferings of the patient. If this view of the Pathology  
of Dysentery be correct, the indications of cure are  
sufficiently obvious. They are to remove inflam-  
mation, with the morbid irritation, and spasms at-  
tending it, to produce a free discharge of the contents  
of the Stomach and bowels, and to restore healthy  
action to the skin. The relief of Spasm (Sag. Doct  
& aldiwell) is a subordinate indication, and its comple-  
tion, of course, when the principle ones are accomplished.

Two different stages are evidently seen in the course  
of this disease, Therefore to treat it properly, due attention  
should be paid to that which is present, at the time when  
advice is applied for; When applied to in the early stages  
of the disease, I think the practice becomes plain and  
easy; I have never deviated much from the mode of



treatment laid down by Doct Chopman. When the in-  
 flammatory symptoms run high, and the patient is  
 young and plethoric, bleeding is indispensable, and  
 must be resorted to as circumstances may require, it is  
 always conducive to the cure, it checks inflammation  
 more promptly than any remedy we are possessed of, it  
 aids in resolving the spasmodic constriction of the intes-  
 tines, of course, it renders them more susceptible to the  
 impression of our remedies, I next exhibit an emetic  
 composed of ℥ss of Ipecacuanha, and ij of  
 the Tincture of Antimony, and Potash, given in bro-  
 ken doses; by its operation it relieves the Stomach  
 of its Nauseous, and morbidly irritating contents,  
 it allays the spasm, and lastly accelerates the peris-  
 taltic motion of the intestines; it stimulates the cu-  
 taneous <sup>capillaries</sup> by a sympathetic action they relieve the hot  
 dry, and parched Skin, by a general diaphoresis;  
 it acts as a power which makes a strong and general  
 impression on the System, and which arrests the disease,  
 the or changes its condition in virtue of that impression.



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to relieve the bowels of their morbid contents, I must re-  
-sort to mercurial purgatives, or purgatives composed of  
℥ii grs of Calomel Vi grs of Rhubarb, and i ℥ of  
Calomel Magnesia, this purgative removes more ef-  
-fectually the offending contents of the intestines, and  
proves more salutary in its effects than any purgative

I have hitherto employed; after this Ol. Rumi to  
the amount of ij ℥, or any of the Neutral Salts,  
are very beneficial, and favourite prescriptions;  
Should the bowels be in a more than usual de-  
-gree of constipation, we must necessarily resort  
to the most active injections, depletion ought to  
be continued until the inflammatory action is  
partially broken or overcome, if the Alvine dis-  
-charges continue, as is frequently the case, I know  
of no remedy comparable to the justly celebrated  
remedy of Doct. Chapman, and which has in all  
cases, where it had a fair <sup>trial</sup> ~~chance~~, proved to be an  
infallible remedy in the cure of this stage of the  
complaint, the following combination is his



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prescriptions. R. Pulv opii  $\text{℥} \text{iv}$  gas. Calomel  $\text{℥} \text{vi}$  gas  
Specacuanha  $\text{℥} \text{viii}$  gas Mix and divide into  $\text{℥} \text{viii}$  por-  
-tions one to be taken every two or three hours. He  
says this is not certainly the most active diapho-  
-retic we possess, but it produces effects still more  
important, it composes, irritations, relaxes the  
surface, gently evacuates the bowels, and makes  
new impressions, which are altogether unintelligible,  
all must acknowledge the utility of the Calomel,  
which acts as well by altering the Bilious, and  
other secretions, as by its evacuant power. Spec-  
-acuanha the most valuable article of the Materia  
Medica in the Cure of Dysentery, has been pre-  
scribed in a variety of ways, by different Authors,  
towards the attainment of the cure of this disease,  
by Cullen its medicinal virtues have been as-  
-cribed alone to its purgative power, by Sir  
John Pringle to its emetic and cathartic pro-  
-perties; by Doct Thomas to its sudorific and  
diaphoretic virtues; with the view of determining





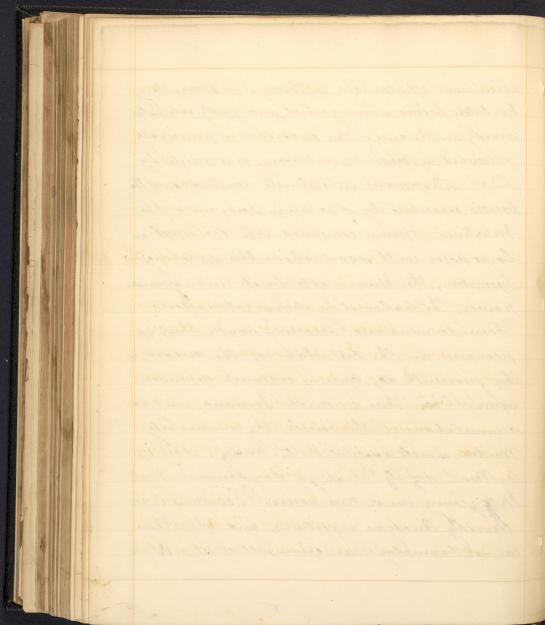


the circulation to the surface of the body, small doses of Opocacuanha may be taken every three or four hours, after proper evacuations, so as to produce, and keep up a gentle perspiration without exciting much nausea. By these means we may be able to cut the disease abruptly short, and arrest it in its progress: Opocacuanha has been by some practitioners prescribed as an emetic, but this I believe to have been of no <sup>great</sup> advantage. By Doct. Chapman its Medicinal Virtues are ascribed neither to its Emetic, Cathartic, nor Diaphoretic properties, as we have other Medicines possessed of each of these properties in a much more eminent degree, which are altogether useless in this disease, I presume it to act by some specific action, peculiar to it alone, by making such an impression on the system, as to predispose it to a favourable termination, and healthy action.

Opium one of the favourite medicines of the

The committee is of the opinion that the  
present state of the country is such that  
it is necessary to take immediate action  
to meet the emergency. The committee  
has considered the various proposals  
and has concluded that the most  
effective course of action is to  
adopt the following measures:  
1. To increase the number of  
members of the committee.  
2. To appoint a sub-committee  
to investigate the causes of the  
present state of affairs.  
3. To request the government to  
take steps to improve the  
administration of the country.  
4. To call for a general election  
as soon as possible.  
5. To request the government to  
take steps to improve the  
education of the people.  
6. To request the government to  
take steps to improve the  
health of the people.  
7. To request the government to  
take steps to improve the  
economy of the country.  
8. To request the government to  
take steps to improve the  
social conditions of the country.  
9. To request the government to  
take steps to improve the  
cultural life of the country.  
10. To request the government to  
take steps to improve the  
religious life of the country.

illustrious Sydenham in the cure of Dysentery,  
 has lately become a very general, and justly celebrated  
 remedy in the cure of this disease; it is principally  
 prescribed by Modern practitioners, as is directed by  
 Doct. Thompson; in obstinate constipation of the  
 bowels occasioned by stricture in some one of the  
 Intestines; Opium combined with Calomel in  
 large doses will soon relieve this distressing  
 symptom, the Opium acts by its antispasmodic  
 power; the Calomel by its purgative effect;  
 When Tormenta and Tenesmus make their ap-  
 pearance in the last stage of the disease, as  
 they frequently do, Opium is much depended  
 upon. When there is much Tormenta, and ac-  
 cumulations in the bowels, the common oil  
 Mustine is well adapted. R. H. Ricinij  $\text{℥}$  Sachij  
 Ag Menth  $\text{ij}$   $\text{℥}$  Arab.  $\text{z}$   $\text{ij}$  Sandanum  $\text{℥}$   $\text{x}$  grs  
 Mij  $\text{ss}$  every one or two hours. Tenesmus is re-  
 lieved by Anodyne injections, and when these  
 cannot be employed an opium pill of  $\text{℥}$  or  $\text{℥}$  grs



may be placed in the rectum, it is more frequently retained than the injection, and we have the same good effects resulting from its introduction.

Calomel not the least important remedy in the cure of this complaint, acts at first by its evacuant power, and lastly by a property which it possesses over all other medicines of the *Materia Medica*, by correcting, or changing the morbid actions of the glands diseased in this complaint.

The different Antimonial preparations have been highly extolled as remedies in Dysentery; By Cullen, Tartar Emetic has been given with advantage, he says he has found nothing more proper or convenient than Tartar Emetic given in small doses, and at such intervals as may determine their operation to be chiefly by stool; The Elixated Glass Antimony has been highly extolled by Sir John Pringle in the cure of Dysentery, therefore it may be resorted to if other remedies fail, in consequence of the harshness of the Medicine in its operation, it will be most advisable to



begin with four or five grains, increasing the quantity  
 according to the effect produced. In looking over a work,  
 I have just procured, I see the Coated Glass of Antimony  
 is very favourably spoken of by Doct. Young, This Writer  
 says he has tried it often, both where bleeding and vomits,  
 have been ~~promising~~ <sup>promising</sup> and where they have not, with the equal success, 66 In  
 its operation he says it sometimes makes the patient sick,  
 and vomits, it purges almost every one, but I have known  
 it cure without any sensible evacuation or sickness, nay,  
 in violent Dysenteries they purge seldom with it than  
 without it. When Doct. Young asserts this remedy  
 to cure a confirmed Dysentery without any sensible eva-  
 cuation, I believe his assertions to be not within the pale  
 of reason, and without any foundation in fact, it  
 might have been beneficial in cases where there was a  
 determination to the intestines, from suppressed pers-  
 piration, but even in this case a restoration of the  
 healthy action to the skin would have produced an  
 evacuation by perspiration, which would have been  
 perceptible; of its virtues as a remedy I know but little,





having never made use of the Medicine, but I presume its beneficial effects to result from its sensible evacuant power, either as a diaphoretic, emetic, or Cathartic.

In particular stages of the disease when the only wish is to induce sweating; The Dovers Powder, says Doct<sup>r</sup> Chapman <sup>is</sup> preferable to all other diaphoretics, it will never disappoint our expectations.

A case of Dysentery lately came under my observation, which was occasioned by a suppression of perspiration, assisted by astringent Medicines, and which were taken as prophylactics; the patient was a strong, stout, athletic man, 4 grs of Ipecacuanha and 15 grs of Opium <sup>in combination</sup> were given him by Doct<sup>r</sup> Powell, which had the desired effect of relieving the patient immediately of the complaint; the Opium was given to overcome the emetic power of the Ipecacuanha, and to direct its operation to the intestines and skin; by its Cathartic, and diaphoretic properties, this case was easily removed as there was no predisposing cause, the immediate or exciting cause being removed the



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disease ceased to exist. Warmth as an external application has been spoken of by several writers (both Ancient and Modern) as being very beneficial in all bowel affections, Sydenham recommends the flannel, or fleecy hosey, or waister in simple Diarrhea, in the cure of which, he says, it is indispensable. In the treatment of Dysentery (says Doct<sup>r</sup> Celsus) the Article of cloathing is of no small importance. Flannel should be worn next to the skin in general, with one or two additional folds of it over the Abdomen —

Doct<sup>r</sup> Lind in his essay on the diseases of hot Climates, recommends fomentations in the cure of Dysentery, when the whole Abdomen is hard, tense, and painful, says the Doct<sup>r</sup> immediate ease is often procured by fomenting it with a decoction of Elder flowers, and Chamomile, together with some heads of White Poppies, sprinkling the flannels apt in the fomentation with Camphorated spirit of Wine, immediately before they are applied.

It has been very earnestly recommended by Doct<sup>r</sup> Chopman in the following manner, as an auxiliary to camphore the great advantage will be gained by warmth



applied to the skin, all must be acquainted with the advantages of fomentations, in relieving the spasm and promoting diaphoresis; The Warm Bath is eminently useful and acts upon the same principle as the topical applications, but on account of the difficulty of procuring a Bath, and the inconvenience necessarily attendant on its employment, it is not a remedy adapted to general practice, and may therefore be dispensed with, except in cases of great emergency, and we should always remember it, as one of our resources in difficulty and danger: In Children however the above objections do not apply, and we may resort to it more frequently, and with greater benefit than Adults. Plasters are eminently useful and cannot be dispensed with in Dysentery, they must be applied to the Abdomen, and not to the extremities as is too frequently the case, in all local diseases, they are more beneficial when applied near the part affected, previous to their application, it is best to premise one or two bleedings, and evacuations from the bowels; some of the stimulating embrocations may also be used in the milder cases; perhaps there is no remedy we make use of against which there is so much prejudice as the



application of a blister to the Abdomen; and I am sure there is no occasion on which we ought more steadily to exert our authority. The proper diet in Dysentery consists in such articles of food as do not increase the active inflammation of the bowels, and which are of easy digestion; they should be fluid, the delicates and demulcents are to be much employed, as barley water, rice water, Mucilage of Gum Arabic, infusion of Slippery Elm, Toast and Water, Arrow Root, Sago, Tapioca occasionally varied for gelatinous broths. In the treatment of the Typhus form of Dysentery, or the secondary stage of the disease, it is obvious, a different practice is demanded, we should attempt the cure by prescribing an emetic, and moderate cathartics, after having evacuated the morbid contents of the stomach and intestines, we should next resort to such remedies as are of a cordial and stimulating nature, such as Opium, Vol. Alk. lbine & Wh. &c. Doct. Chopman thinks it safest to salivate when the Typhus form of fever occurs in the course of the disease, I have never seen the system (says the Doct.) completely under the influence of Mercury without mitigating the symptoms and producing finally a recovery. Assertions coming from







such authority and so unequivocally made cannot be too much depended upon. When the relaxed and weakened state of the bowels seemed to keep up the disease, I have seen the most decided benefit result, by administering a combination of Nitric Acid, and Opium. R. Acid Nitrici  $\text{ij}$   $\text{z}$  Opit  $\text{ij}$   $\text{z}$ ss Az. Puræ  $\text{z}$   $\text{ij}$  M.  $\text{i}$   $\text{z}$  three or four times during the day; The infusion of Quassia, Colombo, or Cascarella, are very good Tonics, and may be administered till the bowels have recovered their vigour and proportion. Nothing would be more improper in this stage of the disease, than the too early administration of Astringents and Opiates, When the bowels have been evacuated of their contents, and the patient's strength is exhausted by frequent returns of the complaint, or from their weak and relaxed condition, a use of these remedies will prove both proper, and beneficial; taking care to obviate <sup>Exhaustion</sup> ~~contumacy~~ by administering a few grains of Rhubarb, or some such gentle laxative. The following prescription is the best I am acquainted with. R. Extract liq. Campeach.  $\text{ij}$   $\text{z}$  Mat. Crota  $\text{iv}$   $\text{z}$  Junci. Catechu  $\text{ij}$  Spirit Nix. Mosch  $\text{z}$   $\text{i}$ . M. of which



mixture take two table spoons full every three or four hours.  
 The Chronic state of Dysentery is that which proves very difficult,  
 and demands much attention. The indications says Doct. Chop-  
 man are to restore action to the surface, the Dovers Powder he  
 particularly recommends assisted by a proper regimen; this  
 keeps up a general diaphoresis better than Tonics which some-  
 times fail. In this stage of the disease a Flannel Roller is  
 very advantageous, it embraces, says Doct. Dewar, all the  
 virtues of the Warm bath without its inconveniences, by  
 means of the Flannel bandage, the Abdomen is kept con-  
 stantly and steadily of a certain temperature, subject to no  
 variation, or change by which the part can take cold, and  
 it can be continued as long as may be necessary, it removes  
 the local Torpor of the Abdomen, which gives the sensation  
 as if the patient had no bowels, it restores the proper ~~for~~  
 feelings of this part, it not only strengthens the Abdomi-  
 nal muscles, and prevents Dyspnœa, and enables res-  
 piration to be performed with more ease, ~~but~~ it strength-  
 ens the intestines, and accelerates the curative process.  
 The benefits resulting from the use of the bandage,

are its affording mechanical support, and keeping up an equable temperature. There are cases however which are protracted by visceral disease, especially by that of the Liver, when this happens, there is a dusky sallow hue of the countenance, tenderness upon pressure over the region of the liver, and a clayey appearance in the faeces, when these symptoms are present, Calomel is to be resorted to, administering it to such an extent as to keep up a gentle affection of the mouth, until the symptoms are mitigated; accompanied with the Calomel the Nitric Acid may also be given.